

Message Text

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15

ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 IO-10 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 DHA-02 /087 W

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P R 170820Z OCT 75

FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6703

INFO AMCONSUL ALEXANDRIA

AMCONSUL ASMARA

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L ADDIS ABABA 12291

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, ET

SUBJECT: DEVELOPMENTS IN THE ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH (EOC)

1. WE ARE HEARING FROM SEVERAL WELL-PLACED SOURCES BELIEVED RELIABLE THAT THE PATRIARCH OF THE EOC, ABUN TEWOFLOS, WAS PLACED UNDER HOUSE ARREST "SEVERAL DAYS AGO."

2. WE ARE ALSO TOLD THAT HIS SECRETARY "KEBEDE," A KEY CONFIDANT, HAS BEEN DETAINED TOGETHER WITH A MONK NAMED ZEWDE WOLDE MARIAM, ALLEGEDLY THE ABUN'S MAN-IN-CHARGE OF PATRONAGE, ADMINISTRATOR OF YOHANNES CHURCH IN ADDIS AND EOC FUNCTIONARY IN CHARGE OF PRIESTS. BISHOP BASILEOS (SEE BELOW) IS ALSO REPORTEDLY BEING DETAINED. THE PLACE OF CONFINEMENT OF THESE MEN IS VARIOUSLY GIVEN AS THE WOSSEN SEGED COMPOUND NEXT TO THIS EMBASSY OR THE HEADQUARTERS OF

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THE FIRST (BODYGUARD) DIVISION. ARRESTED WITH THE

FOREGOING IS SAID TO BE "AMHA," A LAYMAN, "THE ABUN'S PRIVATE LAWYER."

3. WE ARE INCLINED TO GIVE CREDENCE TO THESE REPORTS. HOWEVER, THE REASONS FOR THESE REPORTED ARRESTS REMAIN UNCLEAR TO US. WE ARE TOLD THAT THE PATRIARCH NOMINATED THREE NEW BISHOPS OVER THE STRENUOUS OBJECTIONS OF THE DIRG ABOUT A MONTH AGO. THESE WERE ABA GEBRE MEDHIN (NOW KNOWN BY HIS EPISCOPAL NAME OF "PAULOS"), MELAKU HAILE KIFLE YOHANNES AND "BASILEOS" (WHOSE GIVEN NAME IS BESHHA). "PAULOS" NOW ABBOT OF ST. GEORGE'S CHURCH, TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER OCT. 16 THAT HE AND HIS PEERS WERE CONSECRATED ON OCT. 5.

4. NONE OF THESE DEVELOPMENTS HAVE TO OUR KNOWLEDGE YET EMERGED IN THE MEDIA. THERE IS TALK THAT THE DIRG TOOK THESE MEASURES BECAUSE THE PATRIARCH AND HIS RIGHT-HAND MEN WERE FOUND TO HAVE ENGAGED IN UNSPECIFIED ACTS OF SUBVERSION AS WELL AS FURTHER MALADMINISTRATION OF CHURCH RESOURCES. IT IS ALSO SAID THAT THESE MATTERS CAME TO LIGHT IN CONNECTION WITH TEWOFLOS' ATTEMPTS TO GAIN CONTROL OF AN INITIAL TRANCHE OF FOUR TO FIVE MILLION ETHIOPIAN DOLLARS REPORTEDLY RECENTLY AGREED BY THE DIRG FOR THE PAYMENT OF EOC CLERICAL SALARIES FOLLOWING THE NATIONALIZATION OF RURAL AND URBAN PROPERTIES FROM WHICH THE CHURCH DERIVED ITS INCOME. THE PATRIARCH LOST THAT BATTLE, WE HEAR, THE MONEY BEING PUT INTO THE HANDS OF AN EOC ADMINISTRATIVE COMMISSION CHAIRED BY DR. KENEFFE RIGB ZELLEKE OF THE HIS UNIVERSITY'S INSTITUTE OF ETHIOPIAN STUDIES.

5. WE ARE TOLD THAT THESE EVENTS ARE CAUSING SOME EFFERVESCENCE WITHIN THE HOLY SYNOD AND THE UPPER LEVELS OF THE EOC'S CLERGY. THESE QUARTERS ARE SAID TO BE RIVEN BY CROSS CURRENTS AND QUESTIONS: IF THE DIRG SIGNALING THE FORTHCOMING DOWNFALL OF THE PATRIARCH? IF SO, WHO SHOULD REPLACE HIM? DO THESE EVENTS MARK AN EVOLUTION IN THE DIRG'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE EOC OR WILL ITS ACTION REMAIN LIMITED TO THE ARRESTS ABOVE-DESCRIBED?

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6. WE WILL REPORT FURTHER WHEN THE SITUATION COMES CLEARER. MEANWHILE, HOWEVER, WE DO NOT AT THIS JUNCTURE ANTICIPATE A SIGNIFICANT REACTION FROM THE LAITY TO THESE EVENTS. THE PATRIARCH IS, AS THE DEPT. KNOWS, WIDELY VIEWED AS A VENAL POLITICIAN WHO ALLOWED HIMSELF TO BE USED FIRST BY THE EMPEROR AND THEN BY THE DIRG TO THEIR PURPOSES AT THE EXPENSE OF THE EOC'S

INTEGRITY AND INTERESTS.

HUMMEL

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